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SUBJECT: BASRAH HUMAN RIGHTS DIRECTOR ON OPERATION CHARGE OF THE KNIGHTS

CLASSIFIED BY: Howell H. Howard, Director, U.S. Regional Embassy Office, Basrah, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

¶1. (C/REL MCFI) Regional Embassy Officers met with the head of the Ministry of Human Rights' Basrah office, Mahdi al-Tamimi, April 17 to discuss the humanitarian effects of the GOI's Operation Charge of the Knights (CoK). Mahdi noted that before CoK, Basrah was crime ridden, suffering a murder rate as high as 30 persons a day. CoK significantly lowered criminal activity, but in the process the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) were committing some errors: anyone injured was assumed to be a militiaman and did not get proper attention at hospitals, numerous individuals without militia ties were arrested, the Iraqi Army (IA) stole personal property while searching some areas and mistreated civilians at checkpoints, and he noted that there were cases where it appeared the IA committed extra-judicial killings.

¶2. (C/REL MCFI) On the up side, he noted that people were treated very well by IA units with embedded U.S. advisors and that Basrah Operations Commander, LTG Mohan Hafith al-Fariji, issued a letter to ISF units that laid out the rules for humane treatment based on Mahdi's recommendation. Mohan has also posted the Iraqi Police (IP) at checkpoints alongside the IA, because the IP are better at treatment of civilians. Mahdi also commended the International Committee of the Red Cross for helping to provide aid to families and medical supplies to hospitals. Separately, Rear Admiral Winters told us April 26 that Minister of Justice Safa al-Safi has repeatedly emphasized in planning meetings the need for the ISF to abide by human rights standards.

AHVAZI DETAINEES

¶3. (C/REL MCFI) Mahdi told us that he was not able to locate the six human rights activists from Ahvaz, Iran during a late March visit to al-Mina prison. However, he did locate 18 other Iranians in the prison. Some of the detainees claimed that their families were killed by the Iranian regime and so they fled to Iraq using Arab names for fear of expatriation. Some, he said, were sentenced to five years for illegally crossing the border, but for the time being were "happy to be in jail." They requested that the Ministry of Human Rights (MOHR) and the UN review their cases. Mahdi collected their names, passing the list to MOHR and advised the local chief justice to observe their cases for improper treatment. Mahdi also suggested transferring them to Kurdistan where they would be better

protected and might even claim asylum.

PRIORITIES

14. (C/REL MCFI) Mahdi told us his immediate priority was to visit neighborhoods to conduct battle damage assessments for compensation claims against the GOI. Additionally, he is focused on visiting ISF leaders to cooperate quickly to investigate complaints. The REO is working to facilitate a meeting between Mahdi and the human rights advisors in the ISF. Finally, he wants to provide more assistance to the 200-300 active human rights NGOs in Basrah. Funding is the primary inhibitor for their activity, he said. Mahdi hopes to organize an NGO conference in the near future.

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